



Long Trip to Long Trip

By
Guy W. Wicklander

5 April 1971 to 4 April 1974

I enlisted in the army on 5 April 1971, took their tests and selected aviation maintenance. My basic training was at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, where I graduated on 11 June 1971 but was held over awaiting a Greyhound bus to Fort Rucker, Alabama. I graduated a 67M20 helicopter mechanic on 14 September 1971 and earned a promotion to Specialist 4. Orders started coming in for assignments to Vietnam, but I was among several selected for On The Job Training at the 141st Military Police Company at Fort Rucker. Many of the MPs were either going to or coming from Vietnam.

Now stuck in the MPs as a SP4 they thought I knew what I was doing, so they issued to me a .45, night stick and at times a patrol car. All of this I'm still just an 18 year old kid. Right!

One Sunday afternoon, while posted at the Ozark gate, I noted the blue #2 sticker of the Deputy Post Commander's POV approaching. I came to a textbook attention and saluted likewise. The Deputy Commander was obviously impressed as I received a letter of accommodation, followed by endorsements from the battalion and company commanders. What they didn't know was that after my shift that day, I was getting on an airplane to go get my wife and daughter, as it appeared that I was going to be at Fort Rucker for a while. I was put up for Soldier of the Month, put before the OCS board and offered Warrant Officer training, but I declined. Three years was enough for me!



SP4 Guy Wicklander, MP

On 13 January 1972, I was on duty at the Enterprise gate, an overnight shift, and about 1 AM things became eerie quiet. Then came what truly sounded like a freight train, followed by intensive wind, rain and then nothing. Shortly thereafter, ambulances and emergency vehicles were leaving the post. An ambulance from Daleville stopped and asked how to get to the Pine Brook trailer park. Why? A tornado had hit that location and there were injuries and fatalities. I called the desk sergeant on the land line, as I had no radio on gate posts. I told him I needed to be relieved; my wife and daughter were in our trailer at Pine Brook!

The sergeant replied that he knew about what was going on and, no, you can't be relieved. Pine Brook was less than a mile up the road, and it was very traumatic to stay there on post! In Minnesota, where I was from, tornadoes don't normally happen at night. About an hour and a half later a fellow MP, Bruce Brehm, who also lived at Pine Brook and knew I was on duty, brought my wife and daughter to my post. I would later be best man at his wedding. Newspaper reports would give an accounting of human and physical statistics, which included 119 trailers destroyed, 4 people killed, one a 7-month old baby and 87 injured. On Fort Rucker, 19 helicopters and 2 building were destroyed.

My MP aviation staff sergeant knew someone in DC who could get us an aviation assignment, so my benefit was to report at Fort Eustis, Virginia, for U8/U21 airplane repair training as a 67G20 mechanic, TDY enroute to Vietnam. I graduated on 17 November 1972, and the plan was to take leave and then on to Vietnam. Big change: First it was holdover, then leave, then

holdover in Oakland waiting for a manifest, formation after formation! While housed in cubicles in a warehouse, we finally the sergeant at the podium called out, "SP4 Gary Wicklander." I went up to the sergeant and asked, "Did you mean SP4 Guy Wicklander?" He gave an affirmative reply and said I was going to the land of sun and fun, to which then triggered the cheers and jeers of the hundreds of troops in formation!

After I was issued jungle fatigues and boots, I sent my other uniforms home but kept my field jacket (later caught flak for that). We boarded a stretched DC10 at Travis AFB and headed out. We stopped in Anchorage, Alaska, for fuel and had to deplane. I had my field jacket! Who's the dummy now! There was another fuel stop in the Philippines and then on to Tan Son Nhat airport in Saigon. Opened the door and "whoosh!" Never forgot that!

Finally there, right? Nope. Camp Alpha was a stop awaiting unit assignment. A few days went by and then one day I got an assignment, a flack jacket, hard hat and put on a jeep drive to a compound 20-30 minutes away. I was taken to command post, where SSG Anthony Davis was on duty as it was after hours, and he had an unique way of welcoming a newbie in country. He took care of administrative work and assigned me to my hooch. It was odd to think I would be riding a bus to the airfield, but I sure was glad this was an aviation unit.

The compound was a one story building surrounded by 55-gallon drums of sand, topped with sand bags. The EM Club was right across the street from my hooch. Officers were in trailer houses across the compound. Early on I met guys at the EM Club watching John Wayne movies and drinking 25-cent beers. I would meet others on the bus ride to the airfield.





I was disappointed there wasn't much to do. We didn't even fuel the aircraft; a Vietnamese worker in a Shell fuel truck did that.



One day a pilot, who had just returned from home leave for a newborn child, invited me along for weight and balance check on the tarmac. He did an aborted takeoff as well. Like so many others, I don't remember his name, but I really appreciated our interaction that day.

One person I do remember is SP4 Jim Hall, from Seattle, Washington. He had a girlfriend and an apartment off Truemangee (sp) in Saigon, where guys would meet from time to time. From that apartment we would go to other

parts of Saigon, like swimming at the Olympic-sized pool. The top diving board was blocked off for use.

At the hangar more U21s and U8s were accumulating, where some were being prepped to be sent elsewhere. While at the compound preparations to shut it all down had begun. The guys driving the trucks to the dump said they were being unloaded by Vietnamese scavengers before they got there.



Once our stand-down work was completed we were moved into two-story wooden buildings on the MACV compound. That began a series of various details, such as a group of us were loaded on a duce and a half and taken to a compound at Biên Hòa, vacated by the Air Cav. We were given pump cans of chemicals to clear vegetation. When completed we were instructed to sort out munitions, including various brass and even rockets contained in a large concrete enclosure. Our supervisor, SSG Smith, a black man, refused, telling them that was a job for EOD! He was given a direct order and would not comply. A helicopter was summoned to pick him up and I never saw him again. But, we didn't have to sort the ammo, thanks to SSG Smith.

Another of my detail assignments was guard duty in a tower along the fence line. I wore a flak jacket and hardhat, had issued a rickety old 12-gauge shotgun, a land line phone and stood guard with a ARVN soldier, with whom we could not communicate. If I had to use that old shotgun it meant the enemy was right in my face!

On the morning of the ceasefire, 23 January 1973, Tan Son Nhat was attacked with rockets, sirens going off and one of the guys didn't think it was a good idea to be on the 2nd story of that wooden building, so we went to the bunker

out back and waited for an all clear. It was a tough wait as we had no combat gear or weapons, and the enemy had violated ceasefire agreements in the past. Four civilians were injured and two killed.



When the time came to leave, they held a big farewell gathering at the hangar, with plenty of food and drink., lots of sharing and goodbyes, but then on to Camp Alpha and more waiting for a ride home. My camera was stolen while at MACV, so I lost the photos from this period and prior. Waiting, waiting is all to do at Camp Alpha, besides the EM Club and swimming pool.

While in the restroom of the club, I looked over and there stood SP4 Mark Rovie, a kid with whom I went to school starting kindergarten. He was an avionics tech in a unit across the base from CAC. All the day we spent reminiscing and drinking, too much, had caused us to have a bad interaction with an MP, and we were put in jail overnight. In the morning I went before the Desk Sergeant, SFC Smith (!), who was the supply sergeant at the 141st MP Company at Fort Rucker! “Wicklander, get rid of those friggin beads!” “Sarge, what are you doing here?” It turned out he was from Alabama and never left, and after 19 years of service was told to go to Vietnam or get out of the army.

Finally, our group was put on a flight. We stopped in Seattle for fuel and customs surrounded the plane while we stayed onboard. We landed next at Travis AFB and were going through customs when there was a commotion. SP4 Hall had sent all but a laundry bag of property home as hold baggage and they were just passing him through. He dumped the bag on the table stating, “BS!” “We flew over my home in Seattle! I could’ve been home three hours ago! You’re going through every bit of it!”

A group of us took a taxi to San Francisco airport and we were celebrating being back in the World! Our taxi driver was like: Yeah, so what? Amazingly, I arrived at Minneapolis St Paul Airport the same day I departed Vietnam; the International date line and 30 hours from Saigon to St Paul, Minnesota.

Later, some of us would meet again while assigned to the 156th USASA Aviation Company, located at Biggs Army Airfield, Fort Bliss, Texas. Our U-21s had vertical antennas attached to the wings. Most flights were along the border detecting land line and radio transmissions. Ride alongs were encouraged and on a flight to Fort Huachuca I ran into Major Urick at their hangar.

Finally, I was somewhere doing aviation work and stayed there long enough to be offered promotion to SP5. I declined, only ten months left and ETS 4 April 1974.



SP4 Guy Wicklander
CAC, Saigon 1973